The Influence of Rastafarianism and Reggae Music on Jamaican and International Politics

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Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
M.S. in International Studies

Department
International Studies

This thesis is available at Fisher Digital Publications: http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/intlstudies_masters/42
St. John Fisher College

The Influence of Rastafarianism and Reggae Music on Jamaican and International Politics

A Master's Thesis submitted to

The Faculty of the Master of Science in International Studies Program

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Science in International Studies

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April 2005
Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to show the influence reggae music and Rastafarianism had on Jamaican and international politics. During the 1972 and 1976 elections, the Jamaican people in supporting the candidacy of People’s National Party (PNP) leader Michael Manley for Prime Minister rose up in rebellion against the social, economic, and political conditions in Jamaica. During the campaign, Manley and his opponent, Edward Seaga, appealed to the Rastafarians and Jamaican black power voter movement using reggae artists and adopting Rasta tenets and symbols to garner votes. Reggae music had evolved as a popular musical genre with its lyrics incorporating social and political commentary. The islands lower class blacks, peasants, and unemployed embraced the music as a non-violent protest voice rebelling against white oppression, social injustice, and the dominant race class system. Reggae then moved into the international scene and was ingeniously and successfully marketed to white American and European audiences as the new rebel music. The Rastafarian movement appeared in the 1930’s. Soon, the international popularity of reggae music became associated with and increased the visibility of Rastafarianism spreading the Rastafari gospel throughout the world. The fusion of Rastafarianism and reggae music became a strong voice calling out for island reforms and at the same time, focusing awareness on international issues. To this day, reggae artists with their music continue to critique the international community and Jamaica's social, economic, and political conditions.
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1. Introduction

This research will show how reggae music, defined as a Jamaican popular art form with roots in African culture, blended with modern western musical expressions. The music became an important protest voice of a people to influence political, cultural, and societal change in a non-violent form. Reggae artists brought to the forefront significant social, economic, and political expressions through their music. This research will also provide in-depth analysis to point out how reggae music artists through their songs and lyrics correlated with and influenced international political changes.

This topic is important because it will show how Rastafarianism, which started out as a social movement in Jamaica, West Indies in the 1930's, originated with a strong religious devotion to God (Jah) and a call for black power. Soon, reggae music was integrated into the movement and its hypnotic power was brought to the forefront in influencing societal reforms. It is important to note, the roots of Rastafarianism can be traced back to Jamaica's earliest freedom fighters against colonialism.

At the beginning, there was reluctance in accepting a group of strangely dressed and vocally unintelligible people by the populace. Many in Jamaica viewed Rastafarians as bearded drug addicts and a national eyesore. Soon however, their cultural symbols and philosophies came to be adopted by lower class Jamaican blacks, politicians and the international community.

Religiously speaking, the Rastas had no unified church to speak of, only a sacred belief in the bible. They were devoted to spreading their philosophical beliefs of the biblical sacred truths and the holy word to their Rasta brethren and all Jamaicans who
would listen. Religion was a main driving force among the Jamaican peasants. Even today, their beliefs continue to influence and find believers not only in the West Indies but also around the world.

With the help of Marcus Garvey, spreading the message of black power and uniting black people with their rightful homeland, Africa, was another ambition with the Rastas. Garvey believed that all black people in the western world should return to Africa since they were all descended from Africans. The core purpose of this message was to restore the lost dignity of blacks by severing economic and forced cultural ties with the white world. Spreading the message brought about a large following from the lower class and acceptance of the movement.

The Rastafarian image went through a significant transformation in the 1970s. While the Rastas were perceived negatively at first, in the 1970s they became more of a positive cultural force. During the 70s, reggae garnered international attention largely due to its stirring riffs, powerful lyrics, and riveting performances by Bob Marley and the Wailers. Reggae music came to symbolize Rasta values and beliefs contributing to Jamaica’s art and music.

Besides other media (i.e. newspapers, television, and radio) reggae music has an international following. As a protest vehicle, the music endorsed disobedient attitudes toward the authority of the dominant political, economic, and cultural institutions. Politicians running for office solicited and appealed to the large voting block of Rastafarians and lower class blacks who listened to reggae and followed some of the tenets of Rastafarianism. By adopting these tenets, they felt it would closely align them
with the lower class in their struggle for social reforms, guaranteeing them votes and election victory.

As an example, I will research Michael Manley and Edward Seaga’s election strategies to show how they incorporated Rasta and reggae symbols to influence the outcome of their campaigns and also analyze the music’s importance to the campaign issues of the election period. Reggae artists in their music reflected and critiqued the political turmoil and social conditions in Jamaica. The sources of my information include books, journals, and articles analyzing reggae music. My research will also explore government and public reactions to reggae music.

My project is based on the hypothesis that an art form such as reggae music can influence politics. Specifically, the Rastas and the lower class majority which made up the largest voting block in the country, had politicians identifying with and incorporating their symbols, beliefs, and customs into their election campaigns.

Reggae music projected by Rastafarians and others has shaped contemporary Jamaican politics not only as a protest vehicle, but also as an affirmation of African roots. The music also delivers a similar impact in the international community through its appeal to those who champion the plight of third world people. Of course, it is strongest in capitalist state societies where individual purchasing power (i.e. records, dancehalls, and concerts) allows for exposure to this medium.

The conclusions drawn from this study will illustrate how the use of reggae music was relevant to the issues by individuals running for office. The musical themes influenced the large lower class voting block, encouraged voter opinions, and helped these
men running for office garner votes. Reggae as a cultural art form influenced politics and had an international impact.

In order to understand the origins of reggae music as a political art form we must study its progenitors. Africans were brought forcibly to the Caribbean almost a century before the Mayflower arrived in New England. The Spanish and British enslaved them in the worst example of abused and tortured servitude history has ever recorded. The history of the Jamaican people involves shocking images of pain and suffering. These images are rooted in Africa and continued throughout history to the twentieth century.

During his second voyage to the Americas, European explorer Christopher Columbus set foot on the northern part of Jamaica, at present-day Saint Ann's Bay, on May 4, 1494. After defeating the ‘Tainos’ Indians initial resistance, Columbus seized the island for Spain. Slaves imported from Africa were forced to provide backbreaking labor to meet the greedy demands of the rich and powerful Spaniards.

Colonialism and Eurocentric (domination of European culture at the center of an indigenous culture) culture left a legacy of a profitable sugar trade based on slave labor and a plantocracy prevailing ruling class in the country. The indigenous masses outnumbered the imperialists; this is significant because of the various tribes whose different African languages, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals found themselves and their culture being dominated by the legacies of British rule and cultural norms after the Spanish.

Below the decks of the slave ships, among the sick and dying, when the mood was right, tribal voices joined together in low and painful songs. The slaves sang songs of the horrors around them and songs yearning to go back to their homes. When Africans
were taken away from their homelands, their native drums and instruments were left behind. The drums and instruments made by the slaves in Jamaica often resembled those of Africa but were lacking in sound quality and pitch. They just weren't the same. The one important aspect of their music that was not taken away was their voice. Musical expression thus united all the tribes.

Music as an art form gave expression to African and African-American oppression and beliefs. The emotional effect slavery has had on Jamaicans was heard in the music of that time and is still heard in their music today. In a sense, Jamaican people were born into a world of suffering because of slavery. The vitality of music as a healing, uplifting part of life was born with them. Slavery affected the music of African slaves in Jamaica from the very beginning.

Despite the Eurocentricity of the dominant Jamaican culture, various forms of music have helped the Jamaican people standup and face any obstacles they met at the hands of their slave masters. It was these early times of suffering that shaped the style and role of music in the lives of Jamaicans. Music heated the hearts and souls of those uprooted and tortured. It has been a way of expressing emotions, dreams, and a life of oppression and pain.

Reggae music retains a version and in some cases the melody of African roots. Blended with R&B, Ska, and rock steady, it evolved out of these musical traditions as a unique musical expression and modern cultural variant. The theme of remembering slavery is often heard in reggae music and its lyrics. Many Jamaican musicians continue to remember slavery and often include in their songs and lyrics comparisons referencing the suffering, injustices, and struggles that are occurring in Jamaica today.
Reggae has become an international vehicle for bringing the protest of social, economic, and political oppression to a broad public audience to include an impact on Jamaican politics. The strong impressionistic force of this style of music has attained an international political dimension that warrants scholarly scrutiny.

2. Review of Selected Literature

2.1 The Triangular Trade

Agriculture and slave commerce were shared among the Netherlands, Spain, and England. These countries established trade zones that become known as the ‘Triangle Trade’ with sugar and slaves as the main link to Europe, the Americas, and Africa. As land acquisition and ownership grew in the Caribbean, the need for slaves to work the land also increased. The perfect climate and rich soil conditions of the West Indian islands favored the growing of sugar and other agricultural products to be raised on large plantations.

Richard Alderman gives a closer look at the Triangular Trade and European commerce, in Rum Slaves and Molasses: The story of New England’s’ Triangular Trade, he adds, “Its products consisted of sugar, rum, and slaves from New England to West Africa. Molasses was important to the New England distilleries for the production of rum. Slaves were imported to work the sugar plantations in the Caribbean.”¹ The point of Alderman’s book shows us how slavery and the imported slaves were critical in making the Europeans a dominant trading force in the West Indies.

Slave trading within the Caribbean islands proved to be one of the most extensive in recorded history. This historical fact has long been ignored primarily because slavery has always been commonly thought of in terms of cotton plantations in the southern United States. Edward Brathwaite in his book *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* makes this point; “Significant slave trading to Jamaica began in 1703, and by 1775, almost 500,000 slaves had been brought to Jamaica and more were destined to come.”²

Who supplied this human commodity? Throughout the history of Africa, there have been wars and disputes between many tribes and communities. Victorious tribes would often take members of the defeated tribes and sell them to the Europeans to be slaves or indentured servants. These men and women were taken from different tribes with different languages all over Western Africa and all thrown together as one. In her book, *Jamaica: Old and the New*, Mary Carley points out, “The slave trade shipped about five thousand slaves a year during the peak of the plantation productions and this is exactly how they came here, shipped...The majority of these slaves were brought from tribes like the Coromantes from the Gold Coast and the Ibos from Nigeria.”³ The white men colonists at that time gave no heed to certain relations between families and had no concern for the specific tribes of the Africans. They were all just cattle to them that needed to learn a life of servitude.

The Caribbean islands and subsequent colonies were of central importance for European economic development during the 17th century. They soon became a focal

point of international trade and political conflict. This economic development and the ensuing industrialization of Europe were accomplished in part by the importation of African slaves to the Caribbean. In a short time Jamaica became the largest exporter of sugar in the world. Tremendous estates popped up all over the island and each had slave labor as its backbone.

As mentioned earlier, sugar formed the basis for European attempts to colonize and control the West Indies. It was the most sought after commodity of the period and the largest single English import and the most valuable item in the French overseas trade. Sugar from the cane grown in the region fueled the fire for commercial domination over the islands and its people. Dale W. Tomich in his book, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy 1830-1848*, points out the importance of sugar as a staple and economic commodity in Europe. “Sugar was the foundation of the Golden Age of West Indian prosperity during the eighteenth century.”

Slave labor in part was a large contribution in the industrialization of New England and the enriching of Europe. The industrialization in Europe along with the establishment of the sugar trade also welcomed the development of distillery operations to convert the sugar into rum spirits for mass exportation around the world. Rum production in New England was very efficient as well as profitable and during the 1700 and 1800s. New England rum was considered to be the best rum.

We will see later in the historical overview of this paper, how the European colonial powers got caught up in greed and intense imperial rivalries. This envy soon developed into a game of ‘musical chairs’ as they seized and relinquished colonial

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possessions in and around the Caribbean Sea. The sugar industry and the transatlantic slave trade became synonymous and transformed the Caribbean islands and adjacent mainland territories into highly prized colonial possessions. The labor-intensive growth of this crop in addition to the growing number of plantations, dictated the necessity for more African slaves to work them.

As the number of Africans sold into slavery increased, they brought with them from their homeland an art that was more powerful than the slave masters whip. It was their music. Various styles of music soon evolved from this art that spoke of pain, suffering, oppression, and socio-economic conditions of the past and present. This art evolved and became internationally known as Reggae music.

2.2 Roots of Reggae

Scholars have written much on the history, evolution, societies, and culture that have given rise to reggae music. Literature on the roots of reggae shows how this art form is directly descendent from African culture. As the African slaves arrived via the Triangular Trade, their music remained a constant reminder of their heritage. African music has long been used to show feelings and moods of the people. Davis and Simon in their book *Reggae Bloodlines: In Search of the Music and Culture of Jamaica*, describe how the roots of reggae music have been fixed in slavery. “The Rhythms, songs, and dances that survived well into the twentieth century in rural Jamaica are seen as solely African.”

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In the West Indies, at the very beginning of European colonization, slaves were forced to provide backbreaking labor to meet the greedy demands of the rich and powerful plantation owners. These early times of suffering shaped the style and role of music in the lives of Jamaicans. Various forms of music have helped the Jamaican people stand up and face the many obstacles they have met as slaves during colonial times and freemen living in an independent nation. The music evolved to present day Jamaica where reggae artists created and used this genre calling for Jamaicans to rise up, rebel, and revolt to improve Jamaica's social and economic conditions.

When we speak of reggae music one automatically thinks of Jamaica. Jamaica, after all, is the birthplace of reggae and a direct descendent of African music. Prior to this art form called reggae, there evolved Mento, Calypso, Ska, and Rock Steady as a sub-genre of reggae. Table 1.1 gives us a road map showing the birth of this musical revolution.

Not shown on our roadmap but deserves mention is that during the Mento time, Trinidadian Calypso was the Caribbean’s top musical export and the term Calypso was generally and generically applied to Jamaican Mento as well. Far more often than it was called by its proper name, Mento was called ‘Calypso,’ ‘Kalypso,’ or ‘Mento Calypso.’ Mento artists would often perform calypso songs in the Mento style or record a Mento song with calypso influence. But, make no mistake, Mento is distinctly different sound from calypso with its own instrumentation, rhythms, pacing, vocals styles, harmonies and lyrical concerns.
Mento-jazz recordings first appeared in the 1920s and pure mento recordings first appeared in the 1950s. Numerous artists recorded diverse mento songs in either the classic rootsy acoustic rural style or the more polished jazzy dance-band style. Recordings of Jamaican folk music began in the early 1950s, featuring albums by Edric Connor and Louise Bennett. Many mento recordings were of Jamaican folk songs.

The 1950s was mento's golden age. Then, American R&B hit Jamaica and caused a sensation. Mento is largely eclipsed. First, American R&B recordings dominate, then Jamaican musicians, including some mento stars, record this form. Jamaican recordings of American R&B appear throughout the 50s, but rarely rise above imitation.

By the early 1960s ended, Jamaican R&B begins to be influenced by mento, and the rhythm began to change. Jamaicans responded positively to the new sound. In 1960, Prince Buster had the idea to add even more Jamaican elements, like hand drums, and orchestrates "Oh Carolina", Pre-Ska Jamaican music is born.

Pre-Ska Jamaican music was a short lived phenomenon. Coxsone Dodd assembled the Skatalites, adding the skills of Jamaica's talented jazzmen into the musical mix. The resulting Ska exploded onto the scene. The Ska gave way to the ska style that dominated for two years. This evolved into reggae and its many sub-genres that continue today.
The music delivered a strong message when the people wanted to give a voice to cultural, societal and/or political issues. It heated the hearts and souls of those uprooted and tortured. It is a way of expressing emotions, dreams, and of course complaints about life in pain. In the book *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music*, Wayne and O’Brien write, “The people of Jamaica listen to music not only for its own sake but as part of a unifying communal activity where threatening forces are described, emotions openly expressed, and passions shared.”  

In a sense, Jamaican people were born into a world of suffering because of slavery, and the vitality of music as a healing, uplifting part of life was born with them. When the slave trade ended with Europe and Africa in the 1800’s, contact with Africa was cut off. The different tribes in the new world stayed true to their music and which evolved into different art forms. The message of the emotional effect that slavery has had on Jamaicans was heard in the music of that time and is still heard in the music of today.

### 2.3 Messages in the Music

The definition of genre is as follows: “A style of painting, sculpture, or other imitative art, which illustrates everyday life and manners.” Slavery affected the music of African slaves in Jamaica from the very beginning. Often times, slaves could be heard singing songs of emotional distress while on slave ships. They sang songs of the horrors around them and songs yearning to go back to their homes.

As slave communities grew on plantations, and the slave culture developed, music was performed more and more, gaining importance in their lives. Plantation workers

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7 *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* (MICRA, 1998).
made up and sang these songs while working in the hot sun. In the book *Black Ivory* by James Walvin, one song describes the wish to go home, "If we want to go in a Ebo/ Me can't go there! / Since dem tief me from a Guinea/ Me can't go there!" Some songs served to entertain, but more importantly, to pass the time and ease the pain of hard labor.

The people of Jamaica and their music have developed and evolved in many different ways since the days of slavery, but the overall experience of slavery is rooted deep within. Jamaican people and their roots to slavery, continue to affect the music of Jamaican people today. From mento, ska, rock steady, through the roots of reggae, dance hall, and dub, the ideas and emotions derived from slave times are themes we find still mixed in with Jamaican music.

Social commentary is one such overriding theme that has been and is still used and heard in the music of Jamaica today. Reggae music as a genre rose to popularity as a way to communicate the feelings reflecting the mood of the populations' dissatisfaction with various social issues. The music is considered a non-violent media dominant format. Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett make this point in their book *The Story of The Jamaican People*. They illustrate how reggae is Africa, Jamaica, soul, nature, sorrow, hate, and love all mingled together. It is subliminal music that sings of oppression in exile, a longing for home, or a place to feel at home.”

*Reggae* music was seen as an expression the working and lower class people could identify with to get their messages communicated, loud and clear, to the political establishment. It transcended the lines of race and class gaining an acceptance by all its

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citizens and flowed into the international community as a means to eliminate racial and class lines. All these efforts to make a change created a Jamaican religion called Rastafarianism, and with it came a very powerful means of transporting its message: reggae music.

2.4 The Rastafarian Influence

In Jamaica, Rastafarianism emerged as a native religion that addressed issues affecting the majority of the black population. Along with other members, Leonard Howell founded Rastafarianism to reject colonialism, white racism, encourage black consciousness, and protest political and socio-cultural oppression.

Howell, the son of an agricultural worker and sometimes tailor, left Jamaica in his youth to explore the big world, pausing in New York “to absorb the surging black culture of the Harlem Renaissance and its intense, often fragmented spiritualism. Apparently he never went to Ethiopia, an interesting fact given his obsession with that country and its leader. But no need. He learned how to preach and recruit.”10 These skills allowed him, after some time, to build a following in his home country.

In his article Black Religion and Black Radicalism, Gayraud Wilmore addresses the religion and its issues stating, “It (black religion) has been equally concerned with the yearning of a despised and subjugated people for freedom...freedom from the religious, economic, social, and political domination that whites have exercised over blacks since

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the beginning of the African slave trade. Rastafarianism therefore sprang from the roots of Jamaican culture as a spiritual movement of liberation.

While the Rastafarian influence was felt in Jamaica, we need to look at two men who impacted the movement itself: Haile Selassie and Marcus Garvey. The coronation of Haile Selassie as Emperor of Ethiopia instilled outspoken pride, a spiritual, and physical link to Africa in the movement. The name Rastafari is taken from Ras, meaning “prince” in the Amharic language, and Tafari, the name of the emperor of Ethiopia. Selassie was revered as ‘Lord of Lords, King of kings.’ This view also established within the movement the belief God is black. In identifying with a black God, the Rastas rejected the Christian claim that God is white and thus, white people are born in his image and are thus superior.

Marcus Garvey is the recognized critical link in establishing black pride, black unification, religious, and political indifference against the status quo. Garvey’s back to Africa message had a great impact on the formation and actualization of the ideology of Rastafarianism. As an early leader, Marcus Garvey stressed the importance of repatriation to Africa, and along with that idea, the importance of beating the slave mentality. Garvey wanted to re-socialize the black man to believe himself equal to the white man and could accomplish anything he wanted.

Marcus Mosiah Garvey was born in the parish of St. Ann, in 1887. Garvey became a prominent leader in the fight for equality. He founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which set about to bring all Africans in despair back to Africa. He wanted to see Africans become proud of being African and proud of Africa.

their homeland. In his book *Rastafari Roots and Ideologies*, Barry Chevannes clarifies this message “His message, therefore, called for the decolonization of Africa... freedom from political and military control, as well as freedom from institutional, and religious control.”¹²

In comparing Marcus Garvey and Haile Selassie, Leonard Barrett in his book, *The Rastafarians* states, “Marcus Garvey is second only to Haile Selassie, thus we can see how influential he was to the movement and how he helped shape its foundation. The inception of the movement was founded in key verses of the Old and New Testaments. The Rastas were more interested in the certitude of the doctrine not so much in the empirical truths.”¹³

Rastafarianism is a religion based on social change, and reggae is the means of spreading these beliefs. The music has become an important means of transporting the vital messages of Rastafarianism. Reggae’s message crosses international borders and deals with themes that cut across all aspects of humanity. It also evokes a message of universal suffrage and in doing so, spreads a theme of class-consciousness to the poor, illiterate, and oppressed. Leonard Barrett stresses this point again, in his book. “Reggae still serves as a social safety valve through which oppressed peoples express their discontent.”¹⁴

Much has been written on the topic concerning the link between the Rastafarians, reggae music and its influence as a symbol in politics and culture. This phenomenon has received other scholarly scrutiny. William F. Lewis in his book *Soul Rebels: The Rastafari*, gives us a glance how the late Michael Manley, during his 1972 and 1980

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¹⁴ Ibid., p. 79.
election campaigns, “used Rastafarian music to instruct people on the meaning of economic reform... the PNP...used Rastafarians symbols and reggae music, even though the hope of turning Jamaica into a socialist state seemed no longer possible.”

Michael Manley was the former prime minister of Jamaica. During his tenure as Prime Minister from 1972-1980 and 1989-1992, he was a great influence on Jamaican society. Not only did he publicly show support for the large population of Rastafarians residing in Jamaica, he also sought progressive social and democratic change for the Caribbean and throughout the world.

Son of Norman Manley, who was the nationalist leader under the British colonial regime and founder of the People’s National Party (PNP), Michael attended college in Kingston and served in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He attended the London School of Economics and worked as a journalist with the BBC after graduation. In 1952 he returned to Jamaica and became a trade union negotiator and president of the National Workers Union of Jamaica. He first came to power in 1972 a few years after taking over PNP leadership following the death of his father in 1969. Norman Manley was the original founder of the PNP, chief minister of Jamaica from 1955-1959, and prime minister from 1959-1962.

Michael was quick to appeal to the lower middle class and especially the Rastas to propel him to position of Prime Minister. By embracing the Rastas and their symbols, Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton in their book “Reggae: The Rough Guide” point out this importance stating “The reality of the Rastas cannot be ignored by the politicians. Their voice is the voice of the people and the success or failure of Jamaican leaders henceforth

16 encarta.msn.com
must grapple with the power of these modern day “John the Baptists” whose voices call out from the electronic wilderness”.

Rastafarianism and reggae were instrumental in getting Manley elected as Prime Minister. Bob Marley and other reggae artists performed at numerous rallies. He took the chance of embracing this cultural symbolism even though it was not popular with the greater society. Manley knew these men where essential to the success of his campaign. “Clancy Eccles and Bob Marley a Rastafarian himself endorsed Manley because he saw his potential for change...Clancy even placed a Manley campaign speech over the rhythm of his own ‘Power For the People,’ releasing it as a two-part with the same title.

Another point of observation to be considered, all in all, Manley was a politician. His campaign promises to bring about economic reform failed to integrate into his economic equation, Jamaica’s dependence on foreign countries and its neo-colonial social structure. His promises focused on the social, political, and economic issues the people found important, especially in the Rastafarian community. This failure caused his rhetoric to arguably become nothing more than campaign promises between the Rastas and lower class Jamaicans.

His one success, he was one of the first prime ministers to campaign for economic and social equality among Jamaicans. In his book “The Politics of Change: A Jamaican Testament” Manley states “I have suggested that self reliance, equality, and democracy are the objectives towards which we must strive. Without these we cannot build a ‘just society.’” In striving for equality among Jamaicans, his reforms to bring

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18 Ibid., p. 105.
prosperity to Jamaica proved to be a dismal failure. The reggae music and Rastafarian movement he embraced, remained a strong protest voice against his party.

In spite of his failure to bring about equality and economic prosperity, Manley was an effective Prime Minister and well liked by the people of Jamaica. He brought reggae and Rastafarianism to the forefront of the international community as a political and cultural symbol.

2.5 Reggae Music as a Protest Vehicle

Music is an important part of the Jamaican way of life. It allowed politicians to gauge the sentiment and feelings of the populace by listening to its lyrical messages. Reggae music became a means of expressing the discontent found in Jamaican society. As a social commentary, reggae is a powerful means of attacking the social issues in Jamaica as well as the rest of the world. Police brutality, incarceration, love, gang warfare, poverty, repression, ganja smoking, and Rastafarian beliefs are all dealt with in reggae music.

Early reggae artists such as Jimmy Cliff, Peter Tosh, Bob Marley, and the Burning Spear, brought the message of Rastafarianism into the musical world. It is hard to imagine that Rastafarianism would not have spread outside of Jamaica without the aid of reggae music. “Protest music addresses the social, political, and economic conditions of the times and often speaks directly to the listener’s experience.”

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The reggae music that originated in Jamaica in the 1960s and 1970s emerged out of a long tradition of strong resistance to white culture and domination. The late Bob Marley, a member of the Rastafari movement, is by far Jamaica's most popular and internationally renowned reggae star. More than any other Jamaican musician, he transformed music from just mere entertainment to philosophical discourses in political and racial consciousness.

Social conditions and attitudes found among the black people of Jamaica are well reflected in the reggae music that the island is so well known for. In her article, “Reggae says no to Politricks,” Elena Quamanzo addresses this issue saying “With Jamaica’s newly gained independence, the music of ska and rock-steady both started addressing the increasing social tensions and inequalities that were a result of economic and cultural disparities.”

Because reggae music can be categorized as protest music, it is important to identify exactly what the music is speaking out against. In order to get a clear understanding of the origins of reggae music, one must take a close look at the history of the people, and the economic, social, political, and religious forces that influenced their lives. In his book Caribbean Currents: Caribbean music from rumba to reggae, Peter Manuel gives us a clear look into these influences and forces. “The music began expressing the suffering and struggle of the downtown ghetto experience, especially among the youth, along with the rise of the Rastafarian movement. The lyrics also

emphasized African roots, black redemption, and social awareness. This has been viewed as the most fertile period of Jamaican popular music.\textsuperscript{22}

The adoption of reggae symbols did come at a price within the Rasta movement. Commercialization of this art form produced a visible split between the religious and political Rastafarians. Religious Rastas felt the close association of the music with the movement; the movement was being trivialized and degraded. The more politically orientated Rastafarians hoped to exploit reggae's new popularity to further the political cause of select Jamaicans.

The music has potential force in influencing Jamaican views towards their country and policies, which in turn gives them a strong protest voice about national and international issues. With the support of these and other authors, my contribution to this topic will illustrate how the symbols of the Rastafarian movement and reggae music in particular, are influential internationally and within the political activities of Jamaica.

3. Historical Overview

The historical overview is very important in this paper in that it will build a case taking us to the heart of my study showing reggae music influential effect on Jamaican politics. First we must trace the Africans forced migration and study their years of oppression at the hands of the slave masters. The oppression of Africans is critical because slaves used music to voice their misery and in the process it became a healing force to ease the pain of a seemingly never-ending life of bondage.

The Africans endured slavery through Spanish and British occupation. There was the fight to abolish slavery to include the fight for independence. Through it all, slaves were not allowed to publicly voice the pain and suffering tolerated at the hands of the slave masters. Music was their voice. Soon, this music developed its own recognizable style and international following. It started as an urban cultural symbol and soon evolved into an art whose lyrics demanded the attention of political leaders looking to gauge the attitudes and feelings of their constituents. The story of the evolution of this music is a fascinating journey through Jamaica's colorful history.

3.1 Spanish Occupation

Christopher Columbus discovered Jamaica on May 5, 1494 during his second voyage to the new world and claimed it as a Spanish colony. The island was populated by a thriving colony of Tainos Indians. The purpose of his expedition was to develop a colonial economic system designed to provide raw materials and goods for Spain. The abundance of the island's raw materials allowed Spain to develop a general consumer market, sending wealth to Europe and allow for capital accumulation, all for the benefit of the colonizers. "The European planter has been described as a machine for making money."  

Upon Columbus arrival, the Spaniards enslaved the native Tainos. Under Spanish control, the Tainos suffered famine, pestilence, and cruel merciless slavery. The natives were so overworked and ill-treated that in a short time the entire island population all died out. This extinction was also aided by the introduction of European diseases.

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After the demise of the Tainos population, the Spaniards began importing black slaves from Africa. Slavery represents an important part of Jamaican history and the cultivated dominant atmosphere. For one, plantations highly depended on slave labor to maximize profit margins. “Between 1655 and 1808 one million slaves were forcefully brought to Jamaica.”24 The abuse of the people we now call Jamaican natives was just beginning. The African slaves were being introduced into the slave life as the Tainos. These slaves worked their lives on plantations so others could create successful companies.

After a five-year struggle against the Spanish crown, the British won power. There was a significant rise in the island population under British control. The island was officially ceded to the British Crown under the Treaty of Madrid in 1670. The Spanish continued transporting slaves in other Spanish colonies. Slaves brought to Jamaica by the English were used for plantation cultivation and hard labor. In the late 18th century, Jamaica was soon a prized British colonial possession.

3.2 British Occupation

Under English rule, Jamaica became one of the most valuable possessions in the new world. The English immediately realized its value and before long looked to the green lands of Jamaica with dollar signs in their eyes. Sugar production in Jamaica grew tremendously. “In 1673 there were 57 sugar estates. Sixty-six years later, in 1740, there were 430 separate plantations. Sugar was the cocaine of its time.”25 The island saw a spectacular rise in size and importance as a British colony with high living for the

24 Ibid., p. 21.
25 See Davis and Simon, p. 21.
privileged rich and the establishment of an apartheid class system. The English gradually elevated the island to relative prosperity.

Britain and France, under the Treaty of Utrecht, were awarded a contract for the supply of African slaves to Spanish New World settlements. Africans shipped to the West Indies were mainly prisoners of war from tribal skirmishes or criminals. The Europeans, on some occasions, would stir up African tribal wars to replenish their supply of tribal prisoners who would later be sold as slaves. These slaves were brought from local chiefs in exchange for European goods.

There were struggles and suffering of the most unimaginable nature that would be hard to compare to any individuals pain for this time in history. An African slave describes his experience at the hands of the English: "Slaves were captured from villages along the coast of Africa. That part of Africa, known by the name of Guinea, to which the trade for slaves is carried on, extends along the coast about 3400 miles, from Senegal to Angola, and includes a variety of kingdoms. Raids led by powerful tribes caught many by surprise, capturing men women and children." 26 Slaves were brutally driven to the coast on foot, usually chained to one another and held in factories or large fortified castles built especially for holding purposes until the slave ship arrived for the middle passage to the West Indies. Men, women, and children were tightly packed into ships by the shipmasters who considered them property rather than human beings. They were a valuable commodity meaning; the more slaves carried in the ship's hold equaled large profits. African slaves were thought of as animals or merchandise to be sold to extend the wealth of the already wealthy.

The slave trade gained acceptance and grew steadily. White Europeans and African tribal leaders of these times had in their power to decide the value of human life and to measure human emotions, feelings, and suffering. A preacher, Reverend John Newton, witnessed the conditions of slaves in their quarters and wrote: "The poor creatures, thus cramped, are likewise in irons for the most part which makes it difficult for them to turn or move or attempt to rise or to lie down without hurting themselves or each other. Every morning, perhaps, more instances than one are found of the living and the dead fastened together."\(^{27}\)

Slaves making the long trip across the Atlantic lost a great number of their tribesmen and family members through sickness, injury, brutality, and committing suicide. Cargo holds conditions onboard the slave ships were very inhumane and unfit for human existence. "Doctors and crew members would hardly go under the deck because of the stench permeating the area...odors arose from dead bodies, excretions, and vomit due to sea sickness."\(^{28}\) The slaves themselves felt hopeless in making the long voyage to the new world. They could not grasp what lay ahead of them waiting when they docked ashore; the worst living conditions coupled with years of oppression the rest of the world will never know of or understand.

Suicide was common among many of the slaves who did not want to deal with the suffering. Some managed to hang themselves, others starved themselves by refusing to eat as another method of committing suicide. A ships surgeon, Dr. Falconbridge, describes this situation: "Upon the Negroes refusing to take food, I have seen coals of

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fire, glowing hot, put on a shovel and placed so near their lips as to scorch and burn them. This has also been accompanied with threats of forcing them to swallow the coals if they persisted in refusing to eat... On some ships, the captain would cut off the heads of those who had committed suicide, showing the others that they would go to the afterlife without a head."²⁹

Slaves arriving to the island were used on plantations for cultivating the lands to grow agriculture products for exportation to the New World colonies. The growth of plantations demanded more hands to make the lands profitable. For instance, sugar cane growth and sugar production required a large labor force and it was out of this the need for African slaves to the West Indies grew. As mentioned earlier in the introduction section of this paper, slavery and The Triangular Trade system was formed and at its height in Jamaica. "The countries, which formed 'The Triangular Trade' system in the New World colonies, consisted of England, France, and Spain. Sugar and rum was the link in the infamous Triangle Trade between Europe, the Americas and Africa."³⁰

Under English rule, sugar became Jamaica's main commodity for sale abroad in the 18th century and supported this European trade system. The main driving force for the cultivation of sugar was "the diet of the Europeans had suffered from a deficiency in sugar, which was regarded as a luxury for the rich and medicine for the poor. Europe demanded this delicacy; therefore, it became a high paying business in all three European origins of trade."³¹ The well-known fertile lands of Jamaica were being used to produce a most demanding and labor intensive farm crop.

During these trying times, tribal music slowly evolved as an important part of
everyday life among the Africans in the form of work songs and even social-commentary.
Music was often used as a way of communicating and expressing emotions that soon
united the different tribes and brought about the first call for rebellion. This rebellion
came from a group of slaves known as the ‘Maroons.’

3.3 The Maroons

The Spanish, confident they would never recover the island of Jamaica again,
freed and armed some of their slaves and left them behind to conduct guerrilla warfare on
the invading English. Other slaves fled to the Jamaican highlands and established
colonies. These freed and escaped people and their descendants would later win fame as
the fearsome Maroons. In the West Indies, the word Maroon was used as “...a corruption
of ‘Cimarron’ a term applied by Spaniards and given to the Jamaicans as being anything
unruly, whether man or beast. The Maroons of Jamaica are the offspring of runaways
from the old Jamaica plantations.”32

The Maroons used the highlands of Jamaica to seek refuge, establish colonies, and
plan their attacks on the plantations. The Maroons fought with the guerrilla tactics they
employed while hunting back in the bush of Africa. These tactics involved stealth,
patience, speed, and surprise to attack their enemy. The islands’ rough mountain terrain
proved to be beneficial for these tactics. The European armies were not trained or
experienced in this type of warfare.

Attacks on the English intensified and soon grew into the first Maroon War that
lasted 14 years. The English at this time were considered to be a superior fighting force

and equipped with heavy armament. They had just conquered Spain for island rights, and during this time, Spain held the greatest army in world history. The English desperately tried to locate and destroy settlements; this failed to break the Maroon fighting spirit or determination to remain free. Maroon fighters seemed to be everywhere at once posing a constant threat. “The European population was outnumbered more than ten to one. Breezes rustling the impenetrable fields of towering sugar cane bespoke impending ambush. This frightened overseers and accountants, while the prosperous plantation owners enjoyed the comfort and safety of England.”

The sound of drums with a haunting beat was one of many tactics the Maroons used to strike fear on the plantation houses and give notice of an impending attack. Once again music as a tribal custom played an important part in this slave rebellion. Within Africa and the different tribes, there was a great diversity of music and customs. The slaves brought with them to the new world some of their musical instruments and customs. The drum was one of these instruments.

In the new world, the drum and drumming remained a constant and unifying symbol among the different tribes. Its roots as a cultural icon have survived the test of time and the slave trader’s inability to extinguish it as a part of mother Africa. “Although the permitting of the slaves to make music and dance was purely self-interest of the slave drivers, it allowed for African music to survive for at least the first generation and then later transformed into a neo-African music in some circumstances.”

The drum to this day remained the heart of Africa and the heartbeat of the African tribes and new world African slaves. As a musical instrument and art form it

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communicated a great power and presence among the tribes during this period of rebellion. Among the different tribes, it was a recognized form of communication. Case in point, the Ashanti tribe, from Western Africa, had the greatest influence on Jamaican culture. "The Ashanti tongue, Twi, still carries on to this day throughout the island. The folk religion Kumina...which was practiced by the Ashanti...became the medium of religious expression for all Africans during the slave period."35 The Kumina religion was important in the Maroon rebellion, "A Kumina ritual always involves drumming and dancing."36

The love and the use of the drum in Africa are unprecedented. It is also the oldest and most spiritual instrument known to man. Within the African culture, special occasions called for drumming and using special drums for different occasions. Drummers in African tribes are held in high esteem. There is no doubt that the preservation of African customs and music has been incredible.

The Maroons were relentless and unmerciful in their attacks against the plantations and the plantocracy system. They weren’t going to go away any time soon. The British faced the reality, the existence of the Maroons were a definite threat to the islands plantocracy and the triangle’s economic claim to the island. After all, the entire island economy was based on plantations and slavery. Determined to protect their lucrative European investment, the English realized it was time for a truce. In 1739 a treaty was drawn up, promising the Maroons perpetual freedom, return of runaway slaves, and land in return for performance of certain civil duties such as defending Jamaica and clearing roads.

35 See Barrett, The Rastafarians, p. 17.
The Maroons hold an important place in Jamaican history. They instilled intense fear in the hearts of the European plantation owners and delivered a tremendous blow to the triangle’s economic community. “An anomalous presence, the Maroons have been overlooked in conventional histories both because of the remoteness of their communities and the separate path their history took from that of mainstream… Today the Maroons form a notable chapter in the story of Jamaica’s journey to nationhood.”37 The fighting Maroons reflected a spirit of resistance, rebellion, freedom, and wildness.

The Maroons lived with a greater measure of freedom than their enslaved brethren. It is helpful then to look into the history of resistance and rebellion to better understand the impact of music. Their history of rebellion contributed immeasurably to musical retention that started with the tribes shipped as slaves to the West Indies. The mind-set and actions toward remaining freemen set a precedent for attitudes of resistance and rebellion for the following generations. Music was woven inseparably with the thoughts and actions of the enslaved Jamaican African population. Maroon efforts for musical retention as a culture united the different tribes and contributed immeasurably to this history of resistance and rebellion that is evident in the Rastafarian Jamaican culture to this day.

3.4 End of Slavery

The English were the first of the Triangular Trade countries to abolished slave trading. “The other countries of Europe soon followed England’s outwardly…example

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and outlawed the transportation of slaves.\textsuperscript{38} This action was a sensible move taken for economic reasons. Continued attacks by the Maroons pushed this action. They were a serious threat bent on disrupting and ruining the European agricultural trade economy. On the other hand, this move was probably costly and challenging for the British, sugar merchants, and slave traders. Abolishing slavery would cause loss of revenue to the now profitable slave trade, sugar business, and the growing number of plantations.

On December 27, 1831 in the rural hills of Kingston St. James, a historical battle was initiated which came to be known as the ‘Christmas Rebellion.’ This rebellion forever changed the face of slavery, not only in Jamaica, but the entire Caribbean and the Americas. Against the backdrop of a dying slave system, a spiritual leader, preacher Sam Sharpe, was recognized as key to pushing the rebellion.

Following the abolition of the slave trade, abolitionists redoubled their efforts to force the cause for freedom. The racial attitudes and actions of the English plantation owners after Britain had abolished slavery were contradictory. “The resistance from the sugar planters sparked widespread resentment from the slaves who came to believe that Britain had in fact freed them and that their masters were withholding the news. A seething discontent spread island-wide and was fanned into a flame by slave Baptist preacher Samuel ‘Daddy’ Sharp.”\textsuperscript{39}

The Christmas Rebellion was widely credited with speeding up the abolition of slavery. Sharpe led the slaves from numerous plantations in a violent protest. What was really symbolic in this uprising was that the British quelled the uprising and hanged Sharpe along with other slaves for instigating this rebellion. He did not die in vain; today

\textsuperscript{38} Herbert Klein, \textit{The Atlantic Slave Trade} (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 188.
\textsuperscript{39} See Sherlock and Bennett, \textit{The Story of the Jamaican People}, pp. 213-214.
he is a national hero. The towns square in Montego Bay where Sharpe and his fellow compatriots were hanged now bears his name. This was the last big fight to end slavery. The people of Jamaica showed England they would not put up with it anymore.

So entrenched was the plantocracy culture, the British knew they needed slavery to continue. The plantations were doomed to failure if freed slaves abandoned them. This was free labor at its best making huge profits for the sugar industry. This dilemma also raised two important questions: How do they end slavery and keep the European agricultural economy afloat? How can they continue working the slaves as freemen and still hold them as property?

The fact was, the abolition of slavery didn’t mean slaves could just leave the plantations as freemen and build a new life. A profitable economic system had been built from their years of work. The British in realization, set out and put into action a series of laws. “In 1833 they declared an end to...legal ownership. A system of apprenticeship was instigated, whereby only slaves fewer than six years old and over seventy years old were released immediately.\textsuperscript{40} This act not only split families, it also forced a large majority of the elderly to raise and care for children and babies. “The British Parliament, fearing the complete collapse of the Jamaican economy if they freed all slaves at once “...declared an apprentice period whereby the women and men would be released several years later, in 1838.”\textsuperscript{41}

In theory within the transatlantic region, slave trade was illegal. But, to keep the various countries economies afloat, slave trading remained in effect. Also, the fact that trading continued shows there was little to no attempt to monitor the trafficking of slaves

\textsuperscript{40} Thomas C. Holt, \textit{The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain from 1832-1938} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p.73.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 74
from Africa to Jamaica and anywhere else for that matter. After the abolition of slavery, it continued with France and Spain between Africa and Europe, as well as Africa and Jamaica and America without the third element, the British. The fight of slaves to remain unconditionally free continued. More rebellions followed in the late 19th century to force the complete and non-conditional abolition of slavery.

3.5 Morant Bay

The abolition of slavery fueled the fires of another just cause, the fight for Jamaican independence. As the Jamaicans worked harder without the slave system, they started a momentum toward a strong feeling of nationalism. Morant Bay is seen as the vehicle that fueled the drive. Developments took place, which helped bring the system of plantation slavery to a close. Racial tensions and the unfair oppressive measures relentlessly administered by the British government came to a climatic point at the Morant Bay courthouse.

Just as Sam Sharpe set African-Jamaicans on the road to freedom, Morant Bay and Paul Bogle in 1865 moved the people towards the fight for political liberty. Nationalism and self-rule echoed throughout the island. Jamaicans wanted their island free from oppression and an end to white minority rule. Again, violent resistance toward the English was inevitable.

On October 1865, Paul Bogle had led a group of Jamaicans to rescue one of their fellow citizens, doomed for punishment, from the town magistrate in Morant Bay. Demanding justice, they marched on the town and overwhelmed the police. Shots were fired with both blacks and whites being injured and killed in the confrontation. The
insurgents took over the town and courthouse in protest. A larger part of the British colonial army was called in to quell the violence.

The British governor, Edward Eyre, declared martial law in the town. In the suppression of the abortive uprising, close to 400 people were killed including the people sentenced without a trial. Hundreds were ordered flogged and hanged. Bogle along with the other leaders of the rebellion were captured and executed. The steps Eyre took in handling the rebellion proved to be a fatal mistake to his career.

The response in England to the Jamaica events was not well received. The governor was generally praised for saving the island from economic destruction. Still, these actions raised some important questions, were these barbaric actions justified? Also, would the people of Britain view this as just another in a long line of colonial rebellions put down with brutal force? In time, as the details emerged, opposition in England began to grow against Eyre’s handling of the crisis. Governor Eyre had become the hottest topic of national debate.

“A coalition of antislavery activists, radical politicians, and lawyers formed the Jamaica Committee, chaired by John Stuart Mill. Public pressure led to the government sending a Royal Commission of inquiry to Jamaica to gather evidence on the uprising and its suppression. It delivered its report in April 1866, and while it broadly exonerated Eyre, it concluded that British and Jamaican troops had often used excessive force.”42

Eyre was not faulted by the Royal Commission enquiring into the Morant Bay uprising for acting quickly to put down the rebellion. But, he was condemned for prolonging the period of martial law, the illegality and injustice of Gordon’s trial, and for

the barbarous and wanton punishment inflicted upon many people. The Royal
Commission’s report on Eyre’s handling of the uprising led to his recall and dismissal as
governor of Jamaica. The ancient constitution was scraped and Jamaica became a Crown
Colony, being governed directly from England.

Though reggae music would not be heard as an art form for decades, the use of
African musical symbols in the previous rebellions laid the groundwork for the
oppressive feelings and voices to be heard in future lyrics. Where the lives of some
Africans failed to survive a long journey from their homeland, their music survived the
long trip across the ocean to the new world. Various African tribes blended their music in
the New World to form neo-African music. This new form was almost entirely African-
derived and yet non-African not to be heard in Africa. Forced into bondage, the Africans
were directly responsible for bringing their music to the island.

Music was heard at every possible occasion. It was significant in worship,
celebration, life, death, and hardship. These people also used music to mask the harsh
oppressive conditions they faced. Music was heard in the holds of the ships to help make
an unbearable voyage bearable and to endure despair, heartbreak, loneliness, separation
from home and loved ones; times of rebellion.

In slavery, the arrival of slaves to the island was a moment to be marked with
music. In resistance and rebellion, the Maroons resisted capture and fought against the
British using the drum instrument in tribal dances before inflicting painful attacks on the
numerous plantations. It was a cultural art form that may have been bound for extinction.

The tribal use of the drum and drumming during times rebellion marked the start
of changes on the island in the use of music as a social instrument. In a culture trained to
accept the traditions of their elders, this music has been maintained and passed down to the younger generations. We shall observe in the next section how politicians, religious cults, musicians, and the international community rushed in to observe, capitalize, exploit, and catalogue this cultural art form of neo-African music.

4. Emergence of Reggae as a Cultural Expression

4.1 Labor Parties

The people of Jamaica, the Africans and white Europeans, found themselves in a chaotic struggle on the island. The Africans were in a continuous fight to maintain their freedom and the British, after the Eyre incident, remained on the island to supervise their now profitable colonial economic empire. The importation of slaves from Africa continued to the point the tribes understood their backbreaking labor was responsible in keeping the British sugar economy afloat. Out of this realization came the island’s first lasting labor unions and formation of associated political parties.

The evolution of labor parties was a direct result of the island moving to a crown colony system of government. This new system also called for the English assembly to adopt a new constitution. Within the constitution, the British established the free trade policy that added competition to sugar production on the island. In other words, the different plantations were now able to establish export companies and trade with other countries. “The new constitution also stipulated that the success of the island government would depend on a maintenance of reasonable economic and social conditions.”

43 See Barrett, The Rastafarians, p. 63.
proviso was the beginning of the island peoples struggle toward establishing decent labor relations.

The Jamaican labor force, in the next decades after the Morant Bay uprising, went through a short period of financial independence. Because of the favorable climate and the abolition of slavery, the number of peasant farmers soon increased. Along with this, the economy soon made the move from a sugar-dominated industry to the growing and exportation of various other agricultural products such as various fruits.

The island’s infrastructure was also ideal for the success of the growing fruit industry. “By the end of the nineteenth century, fruit had become Jamaica’s single most important export.” Banana growing became the most abundant and popular product for growth and export.

In 1865, Jamaica sold 79% of its exports to Great Britain, and bought 61% of their imports from the United States. By 1899, the U.S. was now one of Jamaica’s largest trading partners. “In 1903, fruit made up 56% of the island’s exports, half of which came from bananas. Sugar accounted for less than one seventh of the island’s exports, one-quarter the value of bananas.” As mentioned earlier, a few peasants owned fruit lots because of the success from harvesting bananas. This provided financial independence from the British landowners, but the move to a fruit dependent economy signaled the start of the labor problems.

Lorenzo Baker, a fleet fisherman from Boston, joined with some of the independent peasant owners and formed the United Fruit Co. “By 1886 Baker was

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46 Ibid., p. 350.
shipping out 46% of the islands banana crop. In an age when refrigeration was not a possibility, a speedy, organized shipping operation was essential to a successful banana business. Baker formed a close relationship with Atlas, a British owned steamship company. Atlas could speedily deliver the fruit to the states. 47 Ironically, the Jamaican working class was again at the mercy and will of the British, again!

Baker soon monopolized the fruit and shipping industry on the island buying out all the independent peasant landowners who formed United Fruit. The new company was soon renamed ‘Dole.’ This buy out action forced the peasants into becoming wage earners. With this power, the price paid for fruit was never at an agreed upon price and constantly at debate. The company dictated the price of a man’s labor, receiving the product at rock bottom prices and selling it for huge profits on the open market. “Buyers of their fruit would judge the quality of the fruit upon delivery...rejecting it outright and leaving the producer high and dry. Without any alternative, private peasant growers would be helpless.” 48 The company had become successful in their attempts to return the peasants to slavery!

After the buyout of their small lots, peasant workers were in no hurry to return to the fields they had just gained independence from. To prove to the landowners they would not return to a life of enslavement, an attitude of unrest was soon fueled among the black population. To make matters worse, the great depression of 1929 in the United States had Jamaica and the rest of the world experiencing an economic decline. Social and economic conditions in this country were rapidly deteriorating. Unemployment and British racial policies gave rise to the spirit of nationalism and self-determination.

47 Ibid., p. 351.
48 Ibid., p. 355.
American expatriate Marcus Garvey influenced Jamaican blacks by promulgating the call for Black Nationalism. Jamaican blacks once again resorted to violent resistance in the twentieth century.

To get a clear picture of continuing resistance in Jamaican colonial history, we examined the Maroons earlier in this paper. The results derived from their successful rebellion make them an excellent example in the study of the roots of Jamaican resistance. They set the precedent of what can be accomplished using violent rebellion to eliminate unjust oppression when peaceful means fail.

When we study other Jamaican struggles, the Sam Sharpe rebellion of 1831-1832 is another example of successful rebellion in Jamaican colonial history. Barrett’s reasoning to the causes of the Sam Sharpe rebellion allows for some similarities in the start of the labor riots of 1938. "The Sam Sharpe rebellion...called one of the most extensive rebellions in Jamaican history... Barrett posits two causes of this slave revolt. Feelings of relative deprivation, when a segment of society is deprived of the wealth and status enjoyed by another segment because of race, religion, or sexual inferiority imposed by the privileged class... many slaves had physically and psychologically ceased being slaves." The British once again exploited the Jamaicans.

Anger rose among the tribes as the threat of returning to the fields in slave labor loomed over their heads. The colonial history of rebellion once again emerged in the 1930's. The majority of British owned Caribbean colonies were in violent labor unrest. Throughout the whole British Caribbean, labor-based uprisings were threatening the British colonial economy. In 1938, labor violence came to a dramatic head "In Westmoreland at the Tate and Lyle sugar factory... in Spanish Town and Kingston..." On

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49 See Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, p. 44.
Serge Island and in St. Thomas 1,400 workers went on a violent strike for higher wages and shut down of the parish of St. Thomas.\textsuperscript{50} This violence, labor conditions, and workers rights in the British West Indies soon came to the attention of the British government.

In 1938 in the aftermath of the riots throughout the British West Indies, a hastily dispatched Royal Commission called the ‘Moyne Commission’ chaired by Lord Moyne, toured the region, reported on the dismal labor conditions and made some strong recommendations for significant labor and political reform. “The Moyne Commission report was a turning point in the British Caribbean. It urged extending the franchise to women and persons not owning land and encouraged the emerging trade union movement. Unfortunately, many of the Moyne Commission's recommendations were not immediately implemented because of the outbreak of the World War II.”\textsuperscript{51}

Like the Maroon guerrilla war and the Sam Sharpe rebellion, Jamaican freedom and independence was born out of resistance. Out of this resistance, African music gave birth to reggae as an international protest medium. During the 1900’s various genre of music evolved. In the spirit of resistance against the British colonial order on the Caribbean island of Jamaica no music was as strong as the genre of reggae in communicating the feelings of the people.

The foundation of the music is about their oppressors; its lyrics spoke to the oppressed telling them to rise up against its oppressors. In the next chapters of this paper we will move from the historical origins of Jamaican music to describe the foundation,

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 64.
political, and social use of this popular and powerful voice of the Jamaican people known as reggae music.

4.2 Political Parties

The 1938 rebellion sparked the voices of Norman W. Manley of the Peoples National Party (PNP) and Alexander Bustamante of the Jamaican Labor Party (JLP). These two political parties still control Jamaican politics today. First, William Alexander Bustamante at the height of Jamaican labor unrest captured the imagination and hearts of black Jamaicans. “William Alexander Bustamante...formed the Jamaica Trade Workers’ and Tradesmen Union (JTWTU) in 1934 and started protesting against low wages and working class poverty.”52 Bustamante emerged from the 1938 strikes and other labor protests as a populist leader and the principal spokesperson for the militant urban working class. Also, using the JTWTU as a stepping-stone, he founded the Bustamante Industrial Trade Unions (BITU), which inaugurated Jamaica’s workers movement.

Norman W. Manley also influenced the labor movement. Along with the Socialist People’s National Party (PNP), he became closely linked with the Trade Union Congress and the National Worker’s Union. Manley and the National Workers Union together, pressed not only for increased wages but better working conditions and political reform as well.

These two leaders, opponents but never enemies, became the architects of Jamaican independence. Their foresight was a realization the Jamaican people of the African race are as capable as people of any other race of founding and maintaining a

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52 See Sherlock and Bennett, The Story of the Jamaican People, p. 364.
democratic system of government. Based upon this realization, history shows Bustamante and Manley competed for center stage in Jamaican political affairs.

Bustamante advocated for an end to the laws that promoted racial and economic barriers of the downtrodden. Manley supported democratic socialism aimed at building a classless system of government. These fields of thought were quite different but popular with the island people. Manley was well liked and widely respected and became the driving force behind the crown colony's quest for independence and nationalism. “Garvey’s liberating call to African Jamaicans was to an affirmation of radical pride, self worth, and to claiming their African heritage...Manley added the empowering force of a feeling of national unity...Bustamante added a direct and powerful call to the great mass of African-Jamaican people for a better life in a country where they are the majority.”

Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley induced the formation of political parties and were well on the way of placing Jamaica on the road to independence.

The two political parties had hoped to provide a major means of integrating the society. They tried to cut across racial and class lines by bringing together coalitions of interest groups that shared a common concern in the developing political power structure of the country. As an example, one of those developing concerns was to see an early end to colonial rule.

Between the two men there were some distinct differences with breaking away from Britain. Bustamante was not as anxious to see these colonial ties severed because of British paternalism and economic aid. Manley on the other hand supported the cause for

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53 Ibid., pp. 362-363.
self-rule. "In the period 1938-62, Jamaica moved from the colonial condition to full and 
sovereign nationhood."\textsuperscript{54}

From the conduct of these two leaders they learned the underlying principles of 
two party governments. "Their differences of opinion didn’t have to be mean, hatred, and 
vindictiveness...Busta could invite a political opponent to have a drink and swinging to 
the vernacular would say with a laugh, ‘you is only a damn PNP.’ Bustamante and 
Manley were cousins and friendly political rivals."\textsuperscript{55}

In the ensuing years, the man with his lion’s mane of white hair or ‘Busta’, as 
Jamaicans fondly called him, saw the popularity of his party slowly erode. Manley’s PNP 
took its turn at leadership beginning in 1955. Manley also engineered a revised 
constitution that paved the way for full independence from the British. "The next major 
stepping stone for Jamaica was its claim for independence...Jamaica had been in a state 
of gradual decolonization since 1944."\textsuperscript{56}

4.3 Transition to Independence

Under the Crown Colony system, the island governors had great power. There 
was a continued domination by the British. A form of post-slavery colonialism where the 
poor people’s struggle did not end and the economy and its’ people were still supervised 
by the British. Jamaica’s economic and political policies were being directly supervised 
from the European continent. The island went through a tremendous period of great 
prosperity and wealth.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 372.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., pp. 374-375.
\textsuperscript{56} Barry Floyd, \textit{An Island Microcosm} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), p. 49.
Still, there was discontent with the slow pace of the country’s political, social, and economic advance. The growth of the working class, the cluster of schools, churches, professional services, newspapers, government offices, and commercial organizations in Kingston gave it a great advantage to becoming the island’s capitol city. “The black majority who lived in the rural areas was at a disadvantage in respect of education and the health services.”

On August 6, 1962, Princess Margaret, filling in for Queen Elizabeth, formally declared Jamaica an independent nation. The island’s entire population celebrated in the streets. Manley and Bustamante share the mantle as fathers of modern Jamaica, just as their remains now share the hallowed grounds of the National Heroes Park in the governmental district of Kingston.

Jamaica had become an independent nation. Everyone was filled with extreme hope and optimism. In an act reminiscent of black flight from the south in the United States during industrialization, many of the rural inhabitants migrated to the city hoping to find money and a better life. “Though some may have found it, thousands never did. These people settled in fast growing ghettos like Trench town, which was filled with the unemployed and the abused. This group of people became known as the notorious rude boys. The rude boys proclaimed their discontentment and earned a reputation for relentlessly defending their side of town.”

At this time, American Rock and Roll was starting to emerge from R&B.

“The local Jamaican musicians had come up with something new. As a result of listening to and trying to play R&B on records broadcasted from radio stations in Miami

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and New Orleans a new music was developed. They called it ska and it quickly took off in the dance halls of Jamaica.\textsuperscript{59} The last years of ska reflected the dismal and drab mood of the rude boys and the social and economic condition of the country. "But what followed ska was the style known as rock steady, which became the rude boys sound. With the rock steady beat, the rude boys sang about their problems, fears, and their 'rude' attitude."\textsuperscript{60} "Around 1968 the music that replaced rock steady was called reggae."\textsuperscript{61}

We have seen in the previous sections of this paper how throughout its existence, Jamaica has experienced numerous revolutions, riots, and various forms of social unrest. From early resistance by escaped slaves to all-out fighting to end slavery altogether, not to mention riots in past years, Jamaica has been in a constant state of resistance. All these efforts to make a change emerged a Jamaican religion called Rastafarianism and with it, came a very powerful means of conveying Rasta's message: Reggae Music.

\subsection*{4.4 The Rastafarian Movement}

What towered as bizarre and as sudden as it was shocking, a handful of 'crazy men' suddenly appeared in the streets of Jamaica in the middle '30's. Few suspected the profound effect this movement would have on Jamaican society and the world.

Rastafarians as they were called had long hair and were bearded long before the introduction of the hippie movement in the United States. The Rastas came on the Jamaican scene and perceived themselves as a movement with a voice reflecting the ills of society. To accomplish this, they adopted a unique identity. The country of Ethiopia and Emperor Haile Selassie was a great influence on the cult. Adorned on their clothes

\textsuperscript{61} See Davis and Simon, p. 17.}
were the colors of the Ethiopian flag, red, green, and gold. “They embraced Haile Selassie and his title of the ‘Lion of Judah,’ inspiring them to take the image of a lion’s mane formed in a hairstyle called dreadlocks. The Rasta locks...were symbolic of a lion’s mane, an animal with power and authority. The historical backgrounds and rebellious nature of dreadlocks has made it a popular tradition in the Rastafarian culture.”

Trends within the movement revealed how Rastas would meditate, read the bible, and chant assisted by sacramental ganja smoking (marijuana). The best of its followers have an ability to accommodate a religious, political, non-racists view toward Babylon. "Many think that they speak of bringing the White race down, and of their hatred towards Babylon or the oppressors...Babylon represents the corrupt establishment such as the police or other oppressors of the black race. Generally, the message Rastas believe in speaks of equality...consists of the 6 holy truths. The 6 holy truths are:

- Black people are the descendants and of the early Israelites and have been exiled to Jamaica by the White man.
- Haile Selassie is the living God.
- The White person is inferior to the Black person.
- Ethiopia is heaven while Babylon is hell.
- Their God will arrange for their repatriation to Ethiopia.
- In the future Blacks will rule the world.”

Their religious, political, and non-racist doctrine has spread worldwide, wherever blacks lived. These beliefs have also attracted a growing minority of whites. “The Introduction of Rastafarian beliefs to the poverty-stricken blacks of Kingston, Port

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63 See Barrett, *The Rastafarians*. 
Antonia and the district of St. Andrew...eventually spread to other areas of the Caribbean, into parts of the African Nations of Kenya and Ethiopia and into urban centers of the United States, England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand."[64] The Rastafarian religion sought to expand the message and remain together as a group.

The Rastafarian doctrine of Black Power was pre-dated well before groups like the Muslims and Black Panthers came into existence. "The belief in black power and the end of oppression find their roots in Ethiopia...The national anthem of the Garvey movement...which has been adopted by the Rastafarians...expresses the mythic dimension of this ideology with military fervor."[65] Within the movement there was a strong adherence to Garvey’s preaching that all men need to strive toward a universal equality among themselves along with the sacredness of truth and justice.

Marcus Mosiah Garvey was born in the parish of St. Ann, Jamaica in 1887. Garvey became a prominent leader in the fight for equality. He founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which set about to bring all Africans in oppression back to Africa through his back to Africa movement. He wanted Africans to become proud of being African and proud of Africa, their homeland. Garvey stated, "Our desire is for a place in the world; not to disturb the tranquility of other men, but to lay down our burden and rest our weary backs and feet by the banks of the Niger and sing our songs and chant our hymns to the God of Ethiopia."[66]

Through Garvey’s message, the Rastas were convinced that God is black. A black God to the Rastafarians is of the greatest importance, because blackness was synonymous with holiness. Garvey was responsible for influencing Rastafarians in adopting the theme

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[66] Ibid., p. 80.
of a living black God. In his call for repatriation, he strongly linked nationalism to Ethiopia. “The distinctiveness of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, for the movement, lies therefore in the authority of the scriptures of his divinity and in the fact that he is black. His Ethiopian birth further strengthens the belief...for the Bible clearly states that their God would be born in that country.”

The Rasta belief is their God is quite different than the white man’s God that creates all evils found in this world. It is important to note that the entire White race was not thought to be the oppressor. “Rastafarians are not anti-White, contrary to what many think. They preach everyone is on the same level as God intended and we are all humans. If you experience black approach life in a black way, and are ‘spiritually’ African, then you are Rasta.” Marcus Garvey wrote: “The only evil the white man has committed is believing and brainwashing the world their race is superior. The White and black races have their good and bad peoples. Every man should look for the good in people and treat each other each with dignity not by typecasts developed from historical events.”

Haile Selassie as a symbol to Rastas is very important. His role as an African Emperor reflects the view that black men could be strong, contrary to what the Rastas saw in their own country. In their eyes, Ethiopia was a black nation that had been independent for thousands of years, despite its African neighbors. The country had a black Emperor ruling it with black subjects.

Rastafarian papers tell about the first time Rastafari brethren were officially invited to the Emperor’s house. “Haile Selassie is said to have given these brethren instructions not to seek to immigrate to Ethiopia until they had liberated the people of

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67 Ibid., p. 106.
68 See Clarke, Black Paradise: The Rastafarian Movement, p. 82.
Jamaica...following on these instructions the Rastafarians begun to adjust to Jamaica as home. In so doing they set in motion a wave of new industries, the most remarkable and important being music, reggae music.”

Reggae music developed and produced superstars like the late Bob Marley and Peter Tosh. Their popularity caused politicians to become conscious of Rasta and reggae’s influence among Jamaica’s youthful, black majority. We will see later on in this paper the most important influences on the growth of Rastafarianism have been the impact of Prime Minister Michael Manley and Reggae superstar Bob Marley.

The Manley regime provided a backdrop in which the Rastafarian movement could reveal itself to the Jamaican society. “Manley afforded space for the Rastafarians because he articulated a Third World philosophy and Marley opened up that space. It was during this timeframe we get a glimpse of the massive expansion of the Rastafarian value system throughout the Caribbean Europe, and North America.”

Marley began practicing the religion of Rastafarianism and wore his hair in dreadlocks. The influence of Rastafarianism was apparent in the Wailers music. Marley and the band wrote about how Africans have been suppressed by the oppression of the white race. This influence can be seen in two of Marley’s song lyrics, ‘Buffalo Soldier’ and ‘Could You Be Loved.’

As Bob Marley and the Wailers became internationally known, their popularity increased the Rastafarian Movement. “The Jamaican Rastafarian cult is the largest, most identifiable, indigenous movement in Jamaica.” The Rastafarian movement together

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70 See Sherlock and Bennett, _The Story of the Jamaican People_, p. 400.
71 See Barrett, _The Rastafarians_, p. 221.
72 Ibid., p. 8.
with reggae music expanded from Jamaica internationally to several countries around the world.

4.5 History of Reggae Music

Hux Brown, a Jamaican guitarist, once said of reggae music, “it is a description of the beat itself, it is just a fun joke kinda word that means the ragged rhythm and the body feeling.” The reggae sound became more powerful due to the importance of the bass guitar. “Some lyrics incorporated social, political and spiritual concepts and the reggae musicians became Jamaica’s prophets, social commentators, and shamans.”

Reggae is an African Caribbean style of music developed on the island of Jamaica and is closely linked to the religion Rastafarianism. The origins of Reggae can be found in traditional African Caribbean music as well as Rhythm & Blues (R&B) from America.

Ska and Rocksteady were 1960’s precursors of reggae. Ska is a form of Jamaican music that began in the early 1960s. Its sound comes by combining elements of traditional mento and calypso with an American rhythm and blues sound. Rock steady is a result of the slowing of the ska tempo. “These two musical styles developed into Reggae as bass patterns became more complex, percussion more prominent, and brass sections were replaced by the rhythm guitar. The term ‘Rocksteady’ comes from the Alton Ellis recording of the same name.”

When we speak of reggae, one of the first famous reggae artists to truly represent Rastafarianism, the music, and Jamaica was Robert (Bob) Nesta Marley. Bob Marley, who later popularized the style on a worldwide basis, also recorded Rocksteady records.

74 See Davis and Simon, p. 17.
early in his career. The style of reggae he pioneered and made famous is called roots reggae or roots rock reggae. “Roots reggae or roots rock reggae is a type of pure reggae which combines the traditional ska sound with American rock and roll, R&B and pop music. It is the most accessible and most popular form globally.”

“Marley became the king of reggae and a mythical figure in his short-lived lifetime. In this paper, it will be Bob Marley we will focus on as the ambassador and reggae spokesperson. In 1961, Marley recorded his first disc, a solo version of his song “Judge not (Unless You Judge Yourself).” Like numerous other reggae artists, Marley came from the infamous ghetto slum in the section of Kingston called Trenchtown that he immortalized in his rude boy songs.

There is an inescapable link between Jamaican reggae and U.S. soul. “Soul music is a type of music which grew out of ‘rhythm and blues’ and gospel in the late 1950s and early 1960s among African Americans in the United States.” Soul music usually features individual singers backed by a traditional band consisting of rhythm section and horns. The Jamaican reggae fraternity has always had a strong affiliation towards R&B.

The R&B sounds from America that floated over the radios mesmerized teen islanders and musicians. Some formed their own bands and tried to synthesize the R&B sounds. Marley, in 1962, formed his first band, the Wailing Rudeboys that later became the Wailing Wailers. “He formed with neighbors, Neville Livingston (later known as Bunny Wailer) and Peter Mcintosh (Peter Tosh). The group was a sweet voiced harmony

78 www.jahsonic.com/Soul.html.
group that followed the doo-wop and soul music of American greats like The Impressions."79 This synthesized sound with a heavy bass was called reggae.

Recurrent lyrical themes of his songs included a long line of social political issues from poverty and resistance to the oppression of government. Not only did Bob Marley reach out and inspire the people of Jamaica through his songs, he had a tremendous international impact. To put it in another perspective, "Politics is what we do to one another; culture is how we talk to one another. Whenever the two rub is the fission of hope. Marley articulated hopes that reached from Jamaica to the U.S. and Europe, from Africa to the Pacific Rim."80

Musical speaking, reggae is synonymous with Jamaica as jazz with New Orleans, salsa with Puerto Rico, soul with Detroit, and blues with Chicago. It has left its mark on the compositions of international superstars like Paul McCartney, The Rolling Stones, Paul Simon, Eric Clapton, Elton John, and Stevie Wonder.

Because of its non-violent, non-confrontational nature, the combination of American rock and roll, R&B and pop music, reggae music has crossed language barriers, broken down race and class lines, dissolved religious differences, and patched up political divisions.

That until that day

The dream of lasting peace

80 Ibid., p. 156.
World citizenship

Rule of international morality

Will remain in but a fleeting illusion to be pursued

But never attained

Now everywhere is War-War.\textsuperscript{81}

We’ll see further on in this paper that even the government, once so anxious about the power of reggae on the lower class, finally surrendered and recognized reggae and accepted it for what it was, the heartbeat that has kept a nation alive during its darkest decades.

The tenets of the Rastafarian movement along with the musical message of resistance and nationalism were carried to all parts of the planet. “Promoted by Island Records President Chris Blackwell...reggae attracted international attention from American and European musicians, rock critics, and fans around the world...reggae remained a voice of political protest...In the case of international reggae, however, U.S. record companies successfully marketed reggae as a new ‘rebel music’ in hopes that it would appeal to white American college students and European youths.”\textsuperscript{82}

Around the world, the dreadlocked, Rasta image of Bob Marley and the reggae music popularized by him was synonymous with Jamaica, the island where he was born. Marley was an international superstar and a major influence on contemporary music. “Bob Marley stamped his personality on reggae until the sound became identified with the Rastafarian movement.”\textsuperscript{83} So popular was this man and his music that in 1981 as he

\textsuperscript{82} See King, “International Reggae, Democratic Socialism, and the Secularization of the Rastafarian Movement, 1972-1980.”
\textsuperscript{83} See Sherlock and Bennett, The Story of the Jamaican People, p.401.
lay dying from cancer, he was awarded the Jamaican Order of Merit an equivalent to a peerage in the old British Empire.

It is important for us to realize that reggae music was more than just a beat or rhythm. The lyrics are extremely powerful and meaningful. They are filled with sorrow, pride, and hope. Reggae music is different for everyone. It can be seen as a re-awakened African art form or a danceable Caribbean rhythm. "The reason reggae music appeal to many different people is that it satisfies the many needs that people have."\(^{84}\) All in all, reggae has exerted an international and social impact that is remarkable from a relatively small nation such as Jamaica.

### 4.6 What is the Meaning of Reggae Music?

We have focused to this point on Jamaica and its various forms of revolution throughout its history. Africans were brought to the island as slaves also bringing their rich heritage of African music with them. Their music was part of numerous revolutions, riots, and various forms of social unrest. Music conveyed a message as to their feelings and emotions. Music was a part of their oppression and a call for uprising to end of slavery. Music communicated forth-coming doom upon the plantation owners and slave masters.

"Like all folk music, it is essentially commentary; but what is unique about this commentary is that it reflects in every thought, in every musical pulse something to do with survival and accommodation."\(^{85}\) All and All these efforts created a Jamaican

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\(^{85}\) See Davis and Simon, p. 11.
religion called Rastafarianism, and with it came a very powerful means of transporting its message, reggae music.

We have seen how these two forms of expression were born in an environment of oppression, revolution, and resistance. In this birth, we witnessed how Rastafarianism and reggae music have represented the ideologies, attitudes, beliefs, and actions of the people on the island. Rastafarianism as a religion is based on social change and reggae was an important medium used to spread these beliefs.

The movements became successful in changing the status quo by effectively appealing to the island population and their feelings of nationalism. Changing the system was an agreed upon goal supported by the entire black lower class. There arose charismatic leaders like Marcus Garvey who delivered the tenets of change, black power, and nationalism. These leaders then succeed in organizing people such as the Rastafarians who gathered their brethren for support and the reggae artists communicated the feelings of the populace through their music.

Bob Marley along with a host of other reggae artists helped spread the message of Rastafarianism, change and nationalism worldwide. There was a common theme in their music; change can only come about through resistance. Marley said it best in one of his songs:

We sick an’ tired of-a your ism-skism game -
Dyin’ ’n’ goin’ to heaven in-a Jesus’ name, Lord.

We know when we understand:
Almighty God is a living man.
You can fool some people sometimes,
But you can't fool all the people all the time.

So now we see the light (What you gonna do?),

We gonna stand up for our rights! (Yeah, yeah, yeah!)

Get up, stand up! (Jah, Jah!)

Stand up for your rights! (Oh-hoo!)

Get up, stand up! (Get up, stand up!)

Don't give up the fight! (Life is your right!)

The meaning of reggae music is that it became a protest vehicle and gave Jamaicans a unique protest expression to reject British values. The Rastafarians and Jamaican citizens used these expressions to set about communication to the world they were developing a sense of nationalism while seeking an African/Caribbean cultural identity. Acceptance of Rastafarianism and reggae music by the world community established credibility to reggae’s growing international popularity and increased the visibility of the Rastafarian movement.

The adoption of reggae by the Rastafarians and the lyrics in the songs soon played into the hands of the islands political machine. Change, resistance and nationalism were the popular cry throughout the 1972 elections. Plus, Rastafarianism was gradually gaining attention in Jamaica. Michael Manley and Edward Seaga stepped to the challenge to bring about the needed reforms. These politicians made extensive use of reggae and Rasta icons and symbols. We shall see in the next section how politics and music were successfully and undeniably integrated during the 1972 election.
5. Political Use of Rastafarianism and Reggae Music: The
1972 and 1976 Elections

5.1 Michael Manley and the Peoples National Party

During the 1970s, the Jamaican people appeared to "rise up in rebellion and revolt to improve their social conditions."\(^{86}\) Meanwhile, as a vehicle of protest and resistance, reggae music became more popular than ever. Reggae became a genre of Jamaica's continually evolving popular music. It became viewed by many as "the very expression of the historical experiences of the Jamaican working-class, unemployed and peasant."\(^{87}\) Reggae music and its musicians were enjoying a rise in international attention and acceptance from American and European musicians, rock critics, and fans around the world.

The focus in this paper of reggae music in Jamaican politics will be its influence in the 1972 and 76-election victory of Michael Manley and the 1980 victory of Edward Seaga. These historic political events had two men from the white ruling elite, vying for lower class black votes at any and all costs. We will also observe how their campaign strategies thrust Rastafarianism and reggae music even further into the international spotlight.

Norman Washington Manley founded the Peoples National Party (PNP) in 1938. "He was chief minister of Jamaica from 1955-1959 and Prime Minister from 1959-1962."\(^{88}\) Manley's party goals were to lead Jamaicans to independent rule and create a society free of class and economic distinction. Bringing about these reforms would prove


\(^{88}\) encarta.msn.com.
difficult because the British and their traditions were much respected and ingrained in Jamaican society. The need to end colonial rule would become a necessity just to bring about some very basic changes into the Jamaican society in order to move toward any form of self-rule.

Michael Norman Manley, son of Norman Manley, was born into the Jamaican labor and political spotlight. He attended Jamaica College in Kingston from 1935-1962 and served in the Royal Canadian Air Force from 1939-1945. After earning a bachelor's degree and leaving the air force, he attended the London School of Economics from 1945-1949. While living in London, he also took a job as a journalist with the BBC. He returned to Jamaica and took the position of trade union negotiator and president of the National Workers Union of Jamaica.  

Upon Norman Manley’s passing in 1969, Michael, his son, took over the position as leader of the PNP. The PNP began campaigning for him preparing for the 1972 election. He began his campaign by establishing as a goal and party ideology calling for self-rule and nationalism among the island’s black population. “He wanted to implement the correct tactics for a socialist form of government. Manley was...attempting to achieve development objectives in Jamaica through programs of Democratic Socialism.”

Manley’s campaign issues, alliances, tactics, and strategies soon became very controversial. He was one of the first Prime Ministers to advocate for social equality. “I have suggested that self-reliance, equality, and democracy are the objectives towards which we must strive. Without these we cannot build a ‘just society.’”

89 Ibid.
91 Michael Manley, p. 51.
During the national election campaign, “Manley appealed to the Rastafarians and Jamaica’s Black Power movement... He even adopted the Biblical name ‘Joshua’, displayed a ‘walking stick dubbed the ‘Rod of Correction’ allegedly given to him by Haile Selassie during Manley’s 1969 visit to Ethiopia... and promised the Jamaican people deliverance from oppression running on the Democratic Socialist platform... Democratic socialism promised a redistribution of wealth in Jamaica and independence from foreign control.”92 He wholly accommodated and focused his campaign on the black lower class and Rastas.

But most important, he was accessible to and identified with the black Jamaican population. Adopting Rasta cultural symbols and icons and the use of reggae musicians and their music shocked and disgusted the elite white Jamaican voters. “Manley capitalized on his youthful image and stressed social and economic change... when we look at race and class conflicts... we saw the people favoring Manley who was a brown man and married to a black woman. This factor is what Manley used in identifying himself with the black race.”93

The lower and working class proved to be very influential and badly needed to secure votes. Each candidate rushed to align themselves with these people while exploiting two popular sources to gain votes, Rastafarianism and reggae music.

Thrust into the international spotlight by the 1972 election and reggae’s popularity, the Rastafarian movement found itself struggling with some difficult choices as its gospel spread to the four corners of the globe. This caused a conflict between ‘religious’ and ‘political’ elements within the movement. “Religious

93 See Waters, Race, Class, and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics.
Rastafarians...complained that the use of reggae as campaign songs and a source of campaign slogans during the...national elections demeaned the movement...the movement's involvement in politics was 'satanic' because it has caused divisions and stamped a mark of disgrace on the Rastafarian movement...while the more politically oriented Rastafarians hoped to exploit reggae's new popularity to further the cause."94

Because of reggaes sudden attention as an internationally accepted music genre and its association with the Rasta movement, this unprecedented attention on the movement caused tensions and forced the creation of a whole new Rasta movement dedicated to the Rasta image and reggae the music. The people in this new movement came to be known as 'Rastaman'.

Manley entered the 1972 campaign in full force by appealing directly to Jamaica's Rastafarian community. Also, while tapping into the island's rapidly developing popular culture, he hired reggae musicians to play at political rallies whose popular music was getting airplay. This tactic helped make him well liked with the people while boosting record sales for the artists. "Probably the first song used in the campaign was 'Everything Cash' by The Ethiopians. This was a current hit...the party hired all the major artists as well as many other popular artists of the day whose songs expressed dissatisfaction with the country's government."95

"Manley's...oratorical skills, personal charisma, and ability to bring the poor into the political process contributed to his election victory."96 After winning a landslide

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95 See Waters, Race, Class, and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics, pp. 103-131.
victory, Manley told Jamaica's national newspaper, the Daily Gleaner, “I hope that I will be in a position to heal some of the bitter divisions that have entered into our Jamaican life, because I feel that the one thing that a country like Jamaica needs is tremendous goodwill and love.”

Following his landslide victory, Manley’s legislation activities were designed to help the island’s sagging economy and bolster the people’s confidence in their government. “He lowered the voting age to 18, established sugar cooperatives, and supported a bauxite levy in 1974 that helped Jamaica offset higher energy costs due to the international oil crisis of the early 1970s.”

In support of his policies on nationalism and self-rule “...a Land-for-Lease Program was established that made government lands available to farmers, created crash programs to boost employment, offered free secondary education to all Jamaican citizens, and nationalized all foreign-owned electric and telephone services.” To sum it up, Manley’s policies, in his own words, were designed to shift the “power away from the wealthy apex towards the democratic base.”

To develop a Democratic Socialist society. “...in 1974 Manley unveiled his vision of democratic socialism to a stunned Jamaican public. Democratic socialism would, according to Manley, provide an alternative to Puerto Rico's capitalist model and Cuba's communist philosophy.” Democratic socialism promised independence from foreign control, greater access to social programs, new allegiances with other ‘Third World’

98 Manley, pp. 15-17.
100 Manley, p. 87.
nations, and a variety of economic reforms.”

“Depicting ‘democratic socialism’ as both an economic and a ‘moral’ policy, Manley believed the ‘world must be consciously organized to provide equality of opportunity and social justice for all people.’”

The world’s economy was not conducive to Manley’s vision for a Democratic Socialists society. Soaring oil costs and declining bauxite prices were two events which ultimately crippled the islands economy. “The international oil crisis of 1973-1974 virtually crippled Jamaica’s economy. Jamaica’s costs for imported oil climbed from J$65 million in 1973 to J$177 million in 1974.”

While oil prices soared, Jamaica’s traditional foreign-exchange earner, bauxite, declined in both production and exportation. “According to the 1975 Economic and Social Survey Jamaica, Jamaica’s bauxite production fell by 25 percent, and exports of bauxite declined by 31 percent.” Manley’s economic vision for the island was failing and the island was experiencing a huge wave of social unrest marked by violent protest and murder.

Much of the political violence that marred Jamaica in the 1970s and 1980s was derived from a culture obsessed with Hollywood outlaws and their fictitiously violent exploits. For example, Perry Henzell’s 1972 movie, The Harder They Come, starring Jimmy Cliff, depicts the struggles of the early reggae music industry and life in general, in some of the tougher sections of Jamaica. “The hero/villain in the movie is gun toting…heroic challenger of the authority of state power.”

102 Ibid., p. 41.
103 “PM” 1.
The urban poor, suffered from lack of role models, broken families, and second-rate education, hence the content of these imported movies could prove to be highly influential on the youth who viewed them. “Caribbean societies have a long history of ghetto youth internalizing images of Hollywood heroism and gun violence that they regularly absorb in the movies, the cheapest form of entertainment of the urban poor.” 107

Along with the Hollywood movie culture, reggae music morphed into a radical political and violent musical expression focusing upon oppression and government mismangement. The severity of the economic conditions under Manley’s government saw Reggae musicians creating violent images of burning “The Wailers, “Burnin’ and Lootin,”108 and fighting against the authorities “Bob Marley and the Wailers’ “War,”109 and shooting. “The gunfighter/outlaw image has always been there in reggae; it is now, however, without overt references to the Western world as the ‘Sheriff,’ as in Bob Marley and the Wailers’ classic “I Shot the Sheriff.”110

When Bob Marley and the Wailers called for “Revolution” in a 1975 song,111 they no doubt meant peaceful revolution in Jamaica and a revolution in the mind of the island peoples and their political leaders. Reggae lyrics caused the 1976 and 80 elections to become the most violent in the nations history to the point where the music that once called visitors from far away to visit; was in effect turning tourism dollars away because of the island people violently acting out the songs verses.

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107 Ibid.
As a vehicle of protest, reggae music became the voice of frustration for the unsuccessful reforms in the Manley administration. “Nevertheless, Manley was reelected in 1976 in one of Jamaica's bloodiest political elections. By May of that year, an estimated 100 people died in politically motivated violence.” The Jamaican Labor Party (JLP) under Edward Seaga used this opportunity to topple the Manley government using votes and violence. “Some analysts have concluded that crimes are orchestrated and politically motivated rather than apolitical expressions of frustrations and alienation.”

5.2 Edward Seaga and The Jamaican Labor Party

Edward Seaga, a “Boston-born product of Syrian-Jamaican (white) parentage had returned to Jamaica after graduation from Harvard College.” He was a record producer before entering politics. Elected to Parliament in 1962, he was minister of welfare and development (1962–67) and finance minister (1967–72).

By April 1977, Jamaica’s economy was in shambles. According to the 1977 Economic and Social Survey Jamaica, “unemployment had skyrocketed to 24.6 percent.” The International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreed to bail the country out but Manley balked at the strings that were attached. By 1979, Manley’s government found itself $150 million in debt. Seaga saw Manley blaming the IMF as part of the reason for the country’s woes. Seaga’s public focus in an interview stated “the radical element in the PNP who wanted to displace blame for the devastation of the country to the IMF, to the

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112 See Waters, Race, Class, and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics, p. 144.
114 See Waters, Race, Class, and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics, p. 63.
oil crisis, and to international economics...but, the primary issue today is government mismanagement.”

By the spring of 1980, Manley’s political career was virtually over. Seaga and the JLP started campaigning early for the 1980 election focusing on this economic turmoil. This election proved to be the bloodiest in Jamaican history. “In that same year, 750 Jamaicans died in political violence.” Island frustration and tempers were high. The citizens were dissatisfied with the economy, high unemployment, and mismanagement by the PNP.

During this period, the use of Rastafarian and reggae symbols by both parties was at an all time high. Reggae musicians were called in to quell the violence that spilled blood into the streets. Some artists were also responsible for the violence. “Not only were these issues of class and race perpetuated by the PNP and JLP, but also by musicians, especially reggae musicians...The PNP...was putting great efforts into gaining support of the black and poor masses.”

There were many other vicious acts of violence that circulated throughout the political scene besides the violence that surrounded Kingston and other urban areas. Fatalities were numbered close to a hundred. In one internationally highly publicized event, gunmen entered reggae superstar “Bob Marley’s home on Hope Road, shot Marley, his wife Rita, and his manager Don Taylor. Many believe supporters of the JLP carried out this shooting. To this day no concrete evidence has ever been brought forth to

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117 See Waters, Race, Class, and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics, p. 199.
118 Ibid., p. 153.
support this belief.”

Clashes between supporters were on the increase during the elections with no end in sight. Much of the election and campaigning was shrouded in violence. Violence became a means to settling issues and was dividing the country with fear and political hatred. Bob Marley voluntarily intervened. In April 1978, Marley gave a ‘One Love Concert’. “The ‘One Love Peace Concert’ was held during the most trying period for the Manley regime, when it was reported that the country was on the verge of civil war.”

At the concert, Marley brought Manley and Seaga on stage with him. The three joined hands together in a pyramid sign of peace. Marley’s magic and reggae had worked silencing the guns of protest.

Bob Marley took an active role in politics by participating and organizing the ‘Smile Jamaica’ and ‘One Love concerts’. These performances indirectly helped boost the PNP’s support for Rastafarians living in Jamaica. By performing at these shows, one can safely assume that Marley was generally trying to put across the message that politics didn’t need to be violent or destructive. Or, perhaps Bob was trying to get himself elected!

Marley in his music took on hundred of years of violence, anger, and continued oppression. Rastafarians and reggae artists generally took a peaceful approach towards these aspects of life in Jamaica. Reggae artist Peter Tosh was once asked by an interviewer why the government of Jamaica viewed reggae music and its artists as a threat. He replied:

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119 See Barrett, The Rastafarians, p. 223.
120 Ibid.
“Because their words are corruption, and where there’s corruption, there must be an eruption. Yo no see? Politricks! Politician been promising the most good but doing the most dangerous evil. And all the people get is promises. A generation comes and a generation go, and nothing is accomplished.”121

In other words, while the musicians of the time were trying to bring to light the problems of the oppressed and disadvantaged, the politicians were hearing these messages and promising to bring about change. Peter Tosh quite obviously felt little was being done to improve the lifestyle of the Jamaican people and denounced politicians and their efforts as “politricks”.

Calling for early elections in October 1980, Manley brought an end to his own political career. Looking for a vote of confidence failed and the people of Jamaica elected JLP member Edward Seaga as the new Prime Minister of Jamaica. A position he would serve from 1980 to 1989. During his term as Prime Minister, Seaga severed relations with Cuba, promoted close ties with the United States, and emphasized free-market policies. Seaga retired from parliament and as JLP leader in 2005.

**Conclusion**

Musical survival and social survival were related in the new world. Slaves were concentrated in sugar production on the plantations, unloaded ships and carried heavy loads from the docks. As new slaves arrived to the docks music reunited them as a tribal

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121 See Davis and Simon, *Reggae International*, p. 149.
group. The slaves would find any and all opportunity to sing; music lived. Thus every
great event "... is celebrated in public dances which are accompanied with songs and
music suited to the occasion Harvests, hunts, battles, religious ceremonies, rites
associated with birth, initiation, marriage, healing and death were among the many
occasions at which music and dancing was performed." ¹²²

A history of rebellion contributed immeasurably to this musical retention. The
history of resistance and rebellion in Jamaica and the impact of struggles for freedom and
class justice are directly attributable to Jamaican music. Spanish slaves formed the first
Maroon communities. The Maroons and their efforts set a precedent for attitudes of
resistance that sped a deathly slow progress toward greater freedoms for the black
population. Maroons, living with a greater measure of freedom than their enslaved
brethren were best equipped to steward the African cultural musical heritage. The music
would have change or become extinct. It was passed down by the elders and changed
over time.

Music could be heard coming from the small slave communities during all hours
of the night, with chanting, drumming and dancing. Slave owners began to suspect that
drumming and singing were used to communicate ideas of rebellion, so attempts to
regulate these activities were made. These attempts, for the most part, failed.

The British, wanting to make it appear that they freed the slaves out of the
goodness of their hearts, did not care about helping the slaves. They only cared about
helping themselves. Jamaican slave Sam Sharpe organized a large-scale revolt, which is
logged as the Sam Sharpe Rebellion. Under the British, Sam’s rebellion brought a
transfer from institutionalized slavery to institutionalized class structure. Class structuring

instituted by the ruling white elite created a social commentary theme that has been used and is still heard in the music of Jamaica.

Another common theme in Jamaican music rooted in the days of slavery is coping with suffering. The will to keep on living when skies are gray and oppression is heavy is often discussed in the music. The people of Jamaica and their music have developed and evolved in many different ways since the days of slavery, but the overall experience of slavery is rooted deep within Jamaican people and these roots are heard in and continue to affect the music of Jamaican people.

Often, in Jamaican music, the theme of remembering slavery is talked about. There are many Jamaican musicians of today who wish to remember slavery in order to learn from it and to draw hope from the example it has set. The days of slavery are often compared to the suffering in Jamaica that goes on today. Many Jamaican musicians recognize the importance of their ancestor's experiences and draw strength from them still.

The struggles of Africans who were taken from their homes and sold into slavery will never be forgotten because of their roots in the lives of those descended from slaves. The impact that slavery has had on Black people, specifically in Jamaica, can be seen in the music of yesterday and today.

Africans in Jamaica and other parts of the world continue to look towards music as a source of inspiration, a vent for emotions, a form of commentary, and an organizational cry for unity, hope and resistance to oppression. Though reggae music would not begin to take a sound for decades, this cry for unity, hope, and resistance to
oppression laid the groundwork for the oppressive feelings and voice expressed in the music.

Oppression and corruption can be found in many other places, besides Jamaica. Apartheid in South Africa, genocide in Somalia and Rwanda, the repression of a popular movement in Mexico led by the Zapatistas, and the untold working conditions found in multi-national countries. But no one country is known to strongly use the medium of music to communicate public sentiments of government contempt in a non-violent and public manner like the island of Jamaica. Reggae music was and still is an important means of transporting vital messages of the masses. In reggae the musician becomes the messenger, the soldier and the musician are the tools for change.

Reggae evokes a message of universal suffrage, and in doing so spreads a theme of class-consciousness to the poor, illiterate, and oppressed. “It still serves as a social safety valve through which oppressed peoples express their discontent.”123 This theme of unity is matched with the idea that social change is not long in the coming, and that the change will be for the better of all. Reggae also states that it is possible to enjoy life even in the presence of tragedy, since there is always a hope for improvement.

Rastafarianism emerged as a native religion, which addressed issues that affected the majority of the black population “It (black religion) has been equally concerned with the yearning of a despised and subjugated people for freedom...freedom from the religious, economic, social, and political domination that whites have exercised over blacks since the beginning of the African slave trade.”124

123 See Barrett, _The Rastafarians_, p. 7.
124 See Wilmore, “Black Religion and Black Radicalism,” p. 121.
The beliefs that the Rastafarians hold have enabled its followers to gain strength in numbers. The movement has evolved from a small, sheltered group of followers to a worldwide pattern of belief in black power and the end of oppression. The Rastafarian movement has gone through many changes, from an early attempt at self-government, to a force for change in Jamaica. In the past, slavery was the direct cause of inequality, but now wealth and power are the primary factors. The movement sees much of the wealth is concentrated in the hands of the few, and worse than that, these few have no desire to help their fellow man. Change needs to come. These changes have brought the Rastafarians together, as a group, to work for social change within their country and wherever Rasta brothers are faced with oppression.

Music is an important part of the Jamaican way of life, and reggae music has become a means of expressing the discontent found in Jamaican society. As a social commentary, reggae is a powerful means of attacking what is wrong in Jamaica, as well as the rest of the world. "The music of Rastafarians is not only an artistic creation in the Jamaican society, but an expression of deep seated social rage."\(^{125}\)

Early reggae artists, such as Jimmy Cliff, Peter Tosh, Bob Marley, and Burning Spear, brought the message of Rastafarianism into the musical world. It is hard to image that Rastafarianism would have spread outside of Jamaica without the aid of reggae music. "Bob Marley gave the poor a voice in the international arena of ideas."\(^{126}\) The voice Marley and others represented said that the time for change had come, and it will be soon that the walls of Babylon fall.

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\(^{125}\) See Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, p. 27.

The Rastafarians are advocates of a need for social change. They called for it and demanded it. Bob Marley broadcast the message of Rastafarianism worldwide. When he entered that arena, Marley opened the door for other reggae artists to further advance the ideas of Rastafarians.

Artists such as Peter Tosh “the angry rebel who was increasingly conscious of black history.”127 His views were far more drastic than Marley’s. He strongly believed that Babylon must be physically thrown down before there could be any type of freedom in Jamaica. “I and I step to this planet they call Jamaica, not to be condemned by men, but because of the illegal ‘shitstem’ designed by the slave drivers. Sounds like a joke, but the facts are what is joke to you is death to him.”128 This radical stance from a famous reggae artist partially helped incite violence during the elections and may possibly be linked as a cause for the killing of Tosh.

Part of the social change that the Rastafarians required was a redistribution of the land and wealth. They stressed the rich have too much control of the wealth in Jamaica, and they are not spreading it around. This was one of the underlying themes during the election in Prime Minister Michael Manley’s goal to create a Democratic Socialist society.

As mentioned earlier, the politicians utilized popular reggae artists to validate their connection with Jamaican black lower class and Rastafarians. The evolving and emerging music called reggae had a dramatic effect on the politics, election campaign, and violence during the election campaign. Despite the shambles of the Jamaica economy and the staunch and deliberate refusal of some Rastafarians to participate in politics, the

politicians realized the huge voter appeal of reggae and used this expressed ghetto sentiment to rehabilitate their image with the lower class voters.

They launched their campaigns and focused on these particular groups to get more votes. On top of this, the politicians were at the same time, appealing to the Rastas to the point of patronizing them in hopes of gaining their participation in their campaigns. Each of the promised campaign reforms affected the Rastas in one-way or another. For instance lowering of the voting age. This act alone allowed Rastafarians to take on a much larger role in the democratic aspects of the government. This was very crucial because most of the Rastas belonged to the lower class that was also living in the urban poverty-stricken areas. Rastafarianism and reggae, during the election campaigns, was becoming more socially accepted and even admired.

When using these symbols, the politicians where well aware of their actions to align themselves with the lower class majority. In doing so, the people fed off their promises. They used the music to support some of the broken promises they made. "The previous Prime Ministers of both parties did not show any economic improvement and gave the people only broken promises. The voters and people of Jamaica were looking for truth from the singers and players of reggae music instead from the politicians."\(^{129}\)

The overall impact of reggae music on politics, the Jamaican people, and Rastafarians became a wide reaching phenomenon. The poor of Jamaica had their lives shaped around political struggles, violence, music, and empty rhetoric with their traditional music, brought from the homeland of mother Africa behind them. "The differing African tribal music blended in the New World to form neo-African music that were almost entirely African-derived, and yet non-African, for they were not to be heard

\(^{129}\) See Quaman, "Reggae says no to Politricks," p. 25.
in Africa.” 130 It is my hope the reader of this paper has gained an understanding of the political use of Jamaica's musical and cultural symbols during its political period and the impact of reggae music on politics.

130 See Roberts, Black Music of Two Worlds, p. 25.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


